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ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to establish whether and how elementary school principals differ from junior high or middle school principals and senior high principals in their perceptions of their jobs. The results indicate that, with the exception of one variable, no significant difference exists among these groups in their perceptions of job-related tension, of participation in and influence on decision making, of job involvement, and of job satisfaction. The one variable on which elementary principals differed from their secondary counterparts related to amount of job interference with family life; secondary principals tended to perceive more interference than did elementary principals. For the most part, all groups indicated general satisfaction with their jobs. The author surveyed by questionnaire 234 elementary principals, 76 junior/middle school principals, and 91 senior high principals in Minnesota. (Author/DS)

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A COMPARISON OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS
TO JUNIOR/MIDDLE AND SENIOR HIGH PRINCIPALS
ON PERCEIVED JOB RELATED TENSION, PARTICIPATION
IN DECISION MAKING, JOB INVOLVEMENT AND
JOB SATISFACTION

Brent W. Poppenhagen
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BY

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study was aimed at establishing whether and how elementary school principals differ significantly from their junior/middle and senior high counterparts relative to job related tension, participation in decision making, job involvement and overall job satisfaction. The findings indicate that a statistically significant difference does exist for the 234 elementary principals in this study with regard to only one variable, perceived amount of job interference with family life. In the case of all other variables comprising the decision making, job related tension, job involvement, and overall job satisfaction variable classes, there were no significant differences between the 234 elementary principals and their 76 junior/middle and 91 senior high counterparts.

It is generally understood that the duties of principals vary from one educational level to another. For example, elementary school principals, usually operating alone as building administrators, are typically called upon to function as counselors and disciplinarians, instructional leaders and financial planners, schedulers and extra-curricular supervisors. Activities such as these are more likely to be shared or divided among a team of administrators at the junior/middle and senior high level.¹ Therefore, comparisons among principals at the various educational levels are difficult. When comparisons are made, they typically concern salary and status variables.^{2,3} On the other hand, attitudinal differences related to work for principals at the elementary, junior/middle and senior high levels remain virtually unexamined.

This study was designed to examine the general proposition that elementary school principals differ from their junior/middle and senior high counterparts in their perceptions regarding job related tension, participation in decision making, job involvement and overall job satisfaction.

More specifically, the following question was investigated.

Do principals at varying educational levels differ in their:

- a. perceived job related tension
- b. perceived participation in decision making in the immediate work environment
- c. perceived job involvement
- d. perceived overall job satisfaction

Methodology

This study was based on a 1977 mail survey of 569 elementary, junior/middle and senior high principals selected at random from public schools throughout the State of Minnesota. For the purpose of this study, principals were defined as those persons designated with the title principal by a given school district whether or not their duties included some teaching. Assistant principals were not included in the study.

The number of questionnaires returned was 413, which constituted a usable response rate of 72 percent.

The questionnaire was adopted from one used originally by Hollom and Gemmill (1976)⁴ in a similar study concerning a comparison of college teachers by sex for the same four variable classes used in this study. In Hollom and Gemmill's questionnaire, each variable class was represented by a test originally devised by Victor Vroom (1960)⁵ in the case of perceived participation in decision making and overall job satisfaction, Thomas Lodahl and Mathilde Kejner (1965)⁶ in the case of job involvement and R. Kahn (1964)⁷ in the case of job related tension.⁸

Perceived job related tension was measured using fifteen questions each beginning with the phrase, "How often do you feel (think)...", and completed with a statement describing a job related conflict or tenseful situation. Responding principals could elected one of five responses including (1) Rarely, (2) Occasionally, (3) May or May Not, (4) Often,

and (5) Almost Always. Perceived participation in decision making was measured using four questions each beginning with the phrase, "How much influence do you have over (on or in)...", and ending with a statement describing a situation through which influence might be applied. Possible responses included (1) Very Little, (2) Some, (3) May or May Not, (4) Much, and (5) Almost Total. Perceived job involvement was measured using six statements each referring to a potential level of involvement in one's work. Possible responses included (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Undecided, (4) Agree, and (5) Strongly Agree. Variable class IV, overall job satisfaction, consisted of three questions each beginning with the phrase, "To what degree do you have satisfaction with...", and completed with a statement describing a major characteristic of the job. Possible responses included (1) Very Little, (2) Some, (3) Undecided, (4) Much, and (5) Almost Total.

Analysis

The elementary, junior/middle and senior high principals responding to this study can be characterized as experienced administrators who are relatively well paid, middle aged, married, and of the male sex. The median age of responding principals in the study was 47 years. Almost 50 percent of the respondents had been principals for 11 or more years. Fifty-five percent earned in excess of twenty-two thousand dollars annually, while 77 percent had been at their present school for three

years or more. Sixty-nine percent of the respondents were married. Ninety-three percent were males.

The majority of responding principals serve schools which they characterized as rural (58 percent), with student enrollments well below 1000 (91 percent) and in a majority of cases below 500 (56 percent).

Column two of the adjacent table reports the means for the entire group of principals responding to the study. These principals perceive themselves as being relatively free from job related tension, though tension is an "Occasionally" reported factor for the average respondent. While their influence was not total, responding principals did feel that they had "Much" influence upon decision making in their work environment. Additionally, although work was not the only important factor in their lives, responding principals felt that they were deeply involved in their work, with a strong personal commitment. Finally, responding principals perceived themselves as being "Much" satisfied with their current position, although relatively few perceived themselves to be "Totally" satisfied.

The adjacent table also identifies the responses, stated in group means, for each of the three categories of principals as compared to each of the 28 dependant variables comprising the four variable classes of the study. A one way single factor analysis of variance was chosen to facilitate the comparison of group means for each variable.⁹

TABLE
COMPARISON OF ELEMENTARY, JUNIOR/MIDDLE AND SENIOR HIGH
PRINCIPALS PERCEPTIONS CONCERNING JOB RELATED TENSION, PARTICIPATION
IN DECISION MAKING, JOB INVOLVEMENT AND OVERALL JOB SATISFACTION

5

1	2	3	4	5	6
Dependant Variables	Group Mean All Prin. (N=401)	El. Prin. Mean (N=234)	J./M. Pr. Mean (N=76)	S.H. Pr. Mean (N=91)	Signifi- cant at .05 lev.*
<u>Job Related Tension</u>					
How often do you:					
1. Feel that you are not fully qualified to handle your job	1.60	1.57	1.61	1.62	
2. Think that the amount of work you have to do may interfere with how well it gets done	2.77	2.57	2.88	2.87	*
3. Feel that you have too heavy a workload, one that you can't possibly finish during an ordinary day	2.67	2.47	2.83	2.72	*
4. Feel that you can't get information to carry out your job	1.81	1.79	1.96	1.69	
5. Think that you will not be able to satisfy the conflicting demands of various people over you	2.09	1.86	2.12	2.20	
6. Feel that you do not know what the people that work with you expect of you	1.83	1.79	1.88	1.83	
7. Feel upset in having to decide things that affect the lives of individuals, people you know	1.88	1.87	1.96	1.83	
8. Feel that your job interferes with your family life	2.35	1.97	2.46	2.64	**
9. Feel that you have too little authority to carry out the work assigned to you	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.01	
10. Feel that you do not know what your superior thinks of you, how he evaluates your performance	1.93	2.00	1.88	1.93	
11. Feel that you may not be liked and accepted by the people you work with	1.66	1.58	1.73	1.68	*
12. Feel unclear on just what the scope and responsibilities of your job are	1.67	1.65	1.69	1.68	
13. Feel that you have to do things on the job that are against your better judgement	1.80	1.79	1.90	1.71	

TABLE (Continued)
COMPARISON OF ELEMENTARY, JUNIOR/MIDDLE AND SENIOR HIGH
PRINCIPALS PERCEPTIONS CONCERNING JOB RELATED TENSION, PARTICIPATION
IN DECISION MAKING, JOB INVOLVEMENT AND OVERALL JOB SATISFACTION

6

1	2	3	4	5	6
Dependant Variables	Group Mean All Prin. (N=401)	El. Prin. Mean (N=234)	J./M. Pr. Mean (N=76)	S.H. Pr. Mean (N=91)	Signifi- cant at .05 lev.*
14. Feel unable to influence your immediate superior's decisions and actions that affect you	1.91	1.95	1.93	1.87	
15. Feel that you do not know what opportunities for advancement or promotion exist for you	1.61	1.63	1.65	1.56	
<u>Participation in Decision Making</u>					
How much influence do you have:					
16. Over what goes on in your job situation	3.75	3.68	3.86	3.71	
17. On the decisions of your immediate superior regarding things about which you are concerned	3.20	3.16	3.15	3.30	
18. In having your immediate superior ask your opinion when a problem comes up that involves your work	3.62	3.50	3.69	3.69	
19. In getting your ideas for changing or improving part of your job situation across to your superior	3.46	3.37	3.51	3.50	
<u>Job Involvement</u>					
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:					
20. The major satisfaction in my life comes from my work	3.21	3.24	2.98	3.43	
21. The most important things that happen to me involve my work	2.87	2.82	2.74	3.07	
22. I am really a perfectionist about my work	3.17	3.02	3.19	3.32	
23. I live, eat and breathe my job	2.32	2.15	2.32	2.51	
24. I am very much involved personally in my work	4.02	3.97	4.01	4.08	
25. Most things in life are more important than work	2.33	2.47	2.27	2.26	

TABLE (Continued)
COMPARISON OF ELEMENTARY, JUNIOR/MIDDLE AND SENIOR HIGH
PRINCIPALS PERCEPTIONS CONCERNING JOB RELATED TENSION, PARTICIPATION
IN DECISION MAKING, JOB INVOLVEMENT AND OVERALL JOB SATISFACTION

7

1	2	3	4	5	6
Dependant Variables	Group Mean All Prin. (N=401)	El. Prin. Mean (N=234)	J./M. Pr. Mean (N=76)	S.H. Pr. Mean (N=91)	Signifi- cant at .05 lev.*

Overall Job Satisfaction

To what degree do you have satisfaction with:

26. Your current job situation	3.68	3.82	3.75	3.47	*
27. The chance your job provides you to do the things you do best	3.55	3.66	3.58	3.43	
28. The actions of your immediate superior in dealing with people	3.18	3.24	3.19	3.13	

*Significant at the .05 level or below (F probability)

**Significant at the .01 level or below (F probability)

Seven variables were found to have an F probability below the .05 level*.

These included four variables from the job related tension variable class, two variables from the job involvement variable class and one variable from the overall job satisfaction variable class. No significant difference was found between categories of principals in the variable class perceived participation in decision making.

A Scheffee test was administered to those groups of means which yielded significant F's.¹⁰ In only once case, variable 8, "How often do you feel that your job interefered with your family life", was the significant difference attributable to elementary school principals as a group. In this case, a significant number of elementary school principals

felt that their job interfered less frequently with their family life than did junior/middle and senior high principals. In no other case did the groups have means that differed by more than the shortest significant range for any subset of means.¹¹

Discussion

This study was undertaken to establish whether and how elementary school principals differ from junior/middle and senior high principals in their perceptions concerning job related tension, participation in decision making, job involvement, and job satisfaction. The results indicate, with the exception of one dependant variable, that no significant difference exists among groups of principals relative to their perceptions of themselves as subject to job related tension, as participants in decision making, as involved workers and as experiencing job satisfaction. Elementary school principals, it would seem, maintain perceptions of themselves that are similar to the perceptions maintained by other principals though their role as elementary principals may involve a greater diversity of tasks and a more individualistic responsibility for all that occurs in their school building.

NOTES

1. Fred A. Snyder and R. Duane Peterson, DYNAMICS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970, pp. 15-28.
2. SURVEY OF THE ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE PRINCIPAL, Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals and Minnesota Elementary School Principals Association, St. Paul, Minnesota, 1975-76 and 1976-77.
3. James Magestro, THE WISCONSIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL: A STATUS STUDY, Milwaukee: The Wisconsin Elementary School Principals Association, 1973.
4. Charles J. Hollom and Gary R. Gemmill, "A Comparison of Female and Male Professors on Participation in Decision Making, Job Related Tension, Job Involvement, and Job Satisfaction." EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION QUARTERLY, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Winter 1976), pp. 80-93.
5. Victor Vroom, SOME PERSONALITY DETERMINANTS OF THE EFFECTS OF PARTICIPATION, Englewood, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1960.
6. Thomas Lodahl and Mathilde Kejner, "The Definition and Measurement of Job Involvement," JOURNAL OF APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY XLIX, 1965, pp. 24-33.
7. R. Kahn et al., ORGANIZATIONAL STRESS: STUDIES IN ROLE CONFLICT AND AMBIGUITY, New York: Wiley, 1964.
8. A successful application of this questionnaire was made among Wisconsin Public School Principals in 1976 by Dr. Edward Sommer, University of Wisconsin-Superior.
9. William L. Hays, STATISTICS, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963.
10. Ibid.
11. For a discussion of the use of parametric statistics with data of the type used in this study consult Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner and Bent, SPSS: A STATISTICAL PACKAGE FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES, New York: McGraw Hill, 1975, or Lebovitz, "The Assignment of Numbers to Rank Order Categories," AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW, Vol. 35, 1970, pp. 515-24.

FIVE CLASS PRINCIPALSHIP JOB VARIABLE INSTRUMENT

Variable Class I: To the right of each item is a series of numbers. Each number refers to the qualifier above the column. Circle the number of the qualifier which best describes your feeling.

<u>How often do you:</u>		Rarely	Occasionally	May or May Not	Often	Almost Always
1.	Feel that you're not fully qualified to handle your job.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Think that the amount of work you have to do may interfere with how well it gets done.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Feel that you have too heavy a workload, one that you can't possibly finish during an ordinary day.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Feel that you can't get information needed to carry out your job.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Think that you will not be able to satisfy the conflicting demands of various people over you.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Feel that you do not know what the people you work with expect of you.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Feel upset in having to decide things that affect the lives of individuals, people you know.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Feel that your job interferes with your family life.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Feel that you have too little authority to carry out the responsibility assigned to you.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Feel that you do not know what your superior thinks of you, how he evaluates your performance.	1	2	3	4	5

	Rarely	Occasionally	May or May Not	Often	Almost Always
11. Feel that you may not be liked and accepted by the people you work with.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Feel unclear on just what the scope and responsibilities of your job are.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Feel that you have to do things on the job that are against your better judgement.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Feel unable to influence your immediate superior's decisions and actions that affect you.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Feel that you do not know what opportunities for advancement or promotion exist for you.	1	2	3	4	5

Variable Class II: To the right of each item is a series of numbers. Each number refers to the qualifier above the column. Circle the number of the qualifier which best describes your feeling.

<u>How much influence do you have:</u>	Very Little	Some	May or May Not	Much	Almost Total
1. Over what goes on in your job situation.	1	2	3	4	5
2. On the decisions of your immediate superior regarding things about which you are concerned.	1	2	3	4	5
3. In having your immediate superior ask your opinion when a problem comes up that involves your work.	1	2	3	4	5
4. In getting your ideas for changing or improving part of your job situation across to your superior.	1	2	3	4	5

Variable Class III: To the right of each item is a series of numbers. Each number refers to the qualifier above the column. Circle the number of the qualifier which best describes your feeling.

<u>To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:</u>	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The major satisfaction in my life comes from my work.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The most important things that happen to me involve my work.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I am really a perfectionist about my work.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I live, eat, and breathe my job.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I am very much involved personally in my work.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Most things in life are more important than work.	1	2	3	4	5

Variable Class IV: To the right of each item is a series of numbers. Each number refers to the qualifier above the column. Circle the number of the qualifier which best describes your feeling.

<u>To what degree do you have satisfaction with:</u>	Very Little	Some	Undecided	Much	Almost Total
1. Your current job situation.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The chance your job provides you to do the things you do best.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The actions of your immediate superior in dealing with people.	1	2	3	4	5

Variable Class V: Demographic Data (x)

Male _____ Female _____ Married _____ Single _____ Number Dependents _____

Age: Under 25 _____ 25-29 _____ 30-34 _____ 35-39 _____ 40-44 _____ 45-49 _____ 50-54 _____ 55-59 _____
Over 60 _____

Salary: Under 12,000 _____
12,000-13,999 _____
14,000-15,999 _____
16,000-17,999 _____
18,000-19,999 _____
20,000-21,999 _____
22,000-or more _____

Your school organization _____ (designate by structure, such as K-6, 1-6, 6-7-8, 9-12, 10-12, etc.)

Total years in Principalship _____ (all schools)

Total years in Principalship in present school _____

Full time Principal _____ Part time Principal _____

Your school's enrollment _____

Would you characterize your district as (circle one) Urban
Suburban
Rural

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